

Television teams art and science



**Jerry
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Imagine yourself back in the dim distances of the past, when those who would be painters were pounding away at colored rocks, softening, mixing and trying to create pigments they could apply to surfaces so they would dry there, fixing an image.

Or picture yourself early, early in the Bronze Age, when artists trying to be sculptors were trying their metals, learning how to melt and shape and harden them into three dimensional forms.

This is the stage, today, at which the baby medium of television is, according to Ralph Hocking, the bearded proprietor of Binghamton's esoteric Experimental Television Center, one of a handful of

places in New York where serious artists and scientists and technicians are testing the mettle of television.

"In earlier years," said Hocking, who heads the Cinema Department at State University at Binghamton in addition to directing operations at the center, "we mostly showed people how to use our equipment, just the basic operations, and loaned out the equipment.

"We let them find out what they could do.

In recent months, Hocking said, the emphasis at the center has been on the testing of the medium itself, seeking out the full capabilities of the very sophisticated, very expensive, sometimes seem-

ingly miraculous equipment can do.

The center, with its big unadorned walkup room at 164 Court, over the Arrowhead Christian Center, is a place of contrasts.

The big room, once the scene of bingo games, meetings and parties of the Marine Corps League and the Knights of Columbus, is stubbornly unimpressive to a visitor, unless his eye falls on the equipment.

There are black and white and color studio cameras, special effects generators with keyers and color-recording decks and a small host of colorizing and synthesizing systems for the mixing and transformation of images from one or

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many sources.

They include a Paik-Abe (Nam Jun Paik, its famed co-developer, sometimes visits the Binghamton center) with gray-level keyers, hard and soft edge keyers, a variable image sequencer and McArthur Spatial and Intensity Digitizer.

There also is a Jones Four-Channel Colorizer with keyers.

Hocking said he hopes the center's financial backers, chiefly the New York State Arts Council, "will not push us to turn out products, because what we are doing is more important at this stage, learning what television and video are and what they can be.

"Television is a lot more than situation comedy and cops and robbers and talk and game shows. It is not just a body of technique, either. But there are techniques and we have to find out what you can do with them."

The other day this visitor found Peer Bode and Meryl Blackman, both young and serious but this side of grimness, working with a solemn, silent string bass

player; three cameras, four runners and a magical image delayer.

The runners — dancers Bill Jones, A. M. Zane, Cora Brownell and Charles Seltzer of the American Dance Assn. in Frederick Street — were running back and forth the long way of the room, in different time patterns, shouting out numbers when they reached an end wall:

"Eight. Two. Four. One. Sixteen."

From the sidelines, this visitor saw the runners themselves, and saw on three monitors in the foreground what three cameras at different angles to the runners saw.

Another element was the artful mixing of image delays, so that a viewer sometimes had the eerie experience of seeing empty space, identifiable by a window in the background; in one or more monitors at the same time the runners filled the same space seen empty in the monitor.

Bode, who moved from the Buffalo

area to Binghamton recently just to be near this center, has a \$3,500 annual grant from the Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) program.

He said the activity he and Ms. Blackman designed, called "Movements for Video, Dance and Music," looks at human beings as three-dimensional objects that occupy space, rather than as emotional personalities with "human nature" and to that extent the movements had the abstract quality of a Bach partita played by a virtuoso string player.

In addition to the experiments of its own staff, and of talented guests who come in to the center to work with its equipment, the center has both a formal teaching program and some public display of its products.

For example, "Movements" is being shown today for the third and last day at the Herbert Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University in Ithaca.